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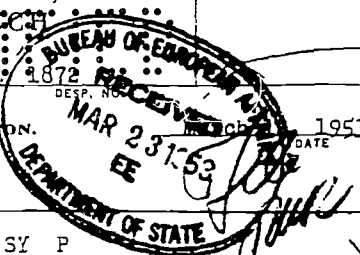
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EXCISE

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SUBJECT:

Report on Albania by Italian Legation, Tirana

There is attached a copy, in translation, of a report from the Italian Legation in Tirana, dated January 10, 1953, to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Albanian internal situation.

Bias

The report deals for the most part with the recent fall of the Chief of Staff of the Albanian Army, Major General Beqir Balloku, who was considered suspect by the present bossess of Albania because of his earlier devotion to the Yugoslav organizers of the Albanian Communist Party. The report also refers to the general unrest among the Albanian people but concludes that discontent of the populace represents a minor threat to the regime because without forceful leadership the Albanian is traditionally incapable of action.

For the Ambassador

Edward L. Freers
Edward L. Freers

First Secretary of Embassy

Enclosure: Informal Translation of Note to Ministry of Foreign Affairs
1/10/53 from the Italian Legation, Tirana

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REVIEWED BY <i>P. Belmont</i>	DATE 3/11/57
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The news that the Chief of Staff of the Albanian Army, Maj. Gen. Beqir Ballokou, is out of favor (with his government) has been confirmed. The news, referred to in previous reports, was recently repeated in newscasts from Belgrade, Paris, London and Monte Carlo.

It was learned from reliable and well-informed sources that last September Ballokou heard of a plot to arrest him and replace him with Maj. Gen. Petrit Dume (cousin of Enver Hoxha) and that Ballokou fled to the mountains with about 15 of his followers in an attempt to cross into Yugoslavia.

With a few days, however, he was tracked down, betrayed and captured in the Kati region. Ballokou was sent to prison in the cellars of the Ministry of the Interior, where he is reported to be at present.

Ballokou's fall is very significant: although his meager education and lack of experience did not qualify him for the position he held, it should be remembered that he was a member of the Politburo, a leader of the Partisan movement and that he succeeded in gaining the good will of Army personnel through his exuberance and simple ways.

The Soviets never showed any great liking for him. This was not entirely due to his lack of ability--which is common to all Albanian generals--but because of the devotion and friendship he showed at one time to Yugoslav leaders who organized the Albanian Communist Party and its Partisan formations (the well-known Miladin Popovic and Dusan Mugosa) and, particularly, Col. Vejo Stojnic, who headed the Yugoslav Military Mission to Albania and who immediately after the liberation of Albania organized the officer corps of 250 Albanian army officers in Yugoslavia.

Ballokou was, therefore, suspect. The increasing number of desertions and "deviations" of high-ranking officers (previously reported by this Legation) certainly helped to feed the discontent and the suspicions of the Soviets.

Moreover, Ballokou had defended his officers against Party sectarianism, the coarse abuses of the Soviet instructors and the continuous interferences of Mehmet Shehu.

Hoxha, relying on the Soviet discontent, seized the opportunity to substitute Ballokou with one of his own cliques--his cousin, Col. Dume, who was promoted to Major General to suit the occasion. Thus Hoxha finally gained absolute control of an army which he heretofore had never been able to control effectively or directly even though he was its Supreme Commander.

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This control is more than ever necessary to Hoxha at this time because of the activities of armed rebel bands and the increasing unrest among the people, which is also noticeable in the attitude of the Army.

This control also permits him to maintain the internal security of the country and to forestall possible unpleasant surprises by political rivals led by his opponent, Mehmet Shehu, who has always attempted to secure a dominating position in the Army.

The arrest of Ballokou, which reportedly followed that of Liri Belishova, is proof of the precarious internal situation of the country. Liri Belishova, the Albanian "Pasionaria," is the widow of Nako Spiro, Albanian communist theoretician who was killed during a meeting of the Council of Ministers. She, too, was a member of the Politburo and it seems she had put up a very strong defense of Ballokou in order to justify his position and activities.

During the past few weeks the situation appears to have worsened. Several minor Party leaders, officers of the Army and the police, and a few diplomats reportedly have been arrested or dismissed from their jobs.

Discontent and ill-will also exists among former Partisans and old-guard communists because former Fascists and servile supporters of King Zog were given the best jobs and were shown preference in State and Party organizations. Demonstrations and rioting by malcontents took place recently in the region of Elbassan, possibly as a result of this situation.

Driving along the road to Elbassan recently, I noticed that "Security Guard" patrols were posted at intervals of 200 meters. Some of the guards were armed with light machine guns and were posted along the side of the road. Occasionally I noticed that groups of communist youth of the Auxiliary Police in plain clothes and armed with guns were patrolling the fields near the road itself.

The country is in dire need: bread has been rationed even for members of the Diplomatic Corps. The people are given a daily ration of 400 grams of yellow, inedible bread. Vegetables, meats and fats are extremely difficult to come by even on the free market, where one kilo of bread costs the equivalent of three dollars.

Malnutrition, lack of clothing, medicines and medical assistance and fuel have had serious repercussions on the morale of the people and on the public health. Coal is issued only to government agencies. Wood—one cubic meter per month—and matches are rationed. Diphtheria and typhus claim many victims among the people and in the Army. The people have reached the depths of desperation. However, they can do nothing but resign themselves to the situation because they are sure that only aid from the outside can modify it. Only further isolated acts of revenge, sabotage and insubordination can be expected: individual acts and not mass action.

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These people, because of their nature, need leadership if there is to be mass action. The Albanian is a solitary man, bound to the earth that provides him food and to the woods that may hide him. His mind is that of the shepherd: a little highwayman, proud and vengeful and tied to his home and his pastures--the environment in which he works and lives.

In the past he recognized no authority but that of the Beys and priests--his natural leaders. He relied upon them for the protection of his general interests, and in return he was ready to support them in religious struggles and in those quarrels necessary to defend the laws of the place, or to promote the general welfare. These considerations explain the rebellion of Vallona of 1920 and also how Ahmed Zogu could organize a march on Tirana and seize power with no more than 1,000 men of the "MATI" belonging to his clan.

At present the Albanian people, deprived of their natural leaders--who have been wiped out by the communists--can do nothing to return to peace and tranquillity and to the wholesome, though modest, well-being of the past.

This leadership and the organization it implies are indispensable in such a backward and disunited country, which is presently under the control of an army of policemen deployed in regions whose religions, customs, interests and ways are entirely different from their own.

The Albanians themselves are subject to increasing forced migration to areas foreign to them. They are terrorized and pauperized; their families and women are threatened, by the pitiless and atrocious repressive actions of the so-called mobile tribunals of Mehmet Shehu.

Translated by MToon

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